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SUBJECT: Papandreou's First Cabinet Meeting: Move Fast, Move Smart,
Be Honest

11. (SBU) On October 7, after a brief swearing in ceremony for the new cabinet, PM George Papandreou convened the first cabinet meeting to outline his policy priorities. He stressed that the new government must focus on moving the country away from "stagnation and decline." Our job, he said, is to tackle problems, not hide them from the people. He recognized that the job ahead would be arduous, especially because, he said, "corruption has turned into a pandemic." Battling this pandemic, pursuing honest government, putting the public interest above all, preserving and defending the wealth of the nation, and assiduously applying the rules of ethics and accountability must be the priorities, Papandreou stressed. The PM highlighted the importance "of the first 100 days" and stressed that the government will concentrate on reducing waste, jumpstarting the economy, beginning the reform of the tax system, and opening the debate for a new electoral law. In an unusual move, Papandreou also announced the immediate termination of all special committees attached to ministries whose members collect fat checks for doing very little or, often, nothing. We will turn a page and write history, Papandreou concluded, only with the help of the people.

12. (SBU) Papandreou's first official trip will be to Cyprus to meet with President Christophias and "reinvigorate" cooperation between Athens and Nicosia at a "critical" time in the Cyprus inter-communal talks, media reports said. More international contacts should follow soon. Russian PM Putin, upon congratulating the new Greek PM, extended an invitation to Papandreou to visit Moscow; and Papandreou, the press said, has already spoken with Turkish PM Erdogan to invite him to Athens. Reports suggested that Papandreou will resume his "proactive" style as FM, with his alternate minister Dimitris Droutsas and deputy minister Spyros Kouvelis assuming a "multi-faceted" schedule aimed at "making Greece's voice heard again abroad". Shortly before the transition ceremony at the MFA, Papandreou and his predecessor, Dora Bakoyannis, spoke privately for nearly an hour, with reports emphasizing that the length of the meeting signified a "substantive briefing" of the new FM on important pending issues. Later, Bakoyannis, who appeared in "excellent" spirits but was attended by two grim faced deputy ministers, who have both failed to win reelection to parliament, delivered a farewell message that was in reality a "policy speech," reports said. Upon his turn, Papandreou limited himself to very brief remarks expressing his pleasure for returning "to such a familiar and dear place," thanking the outgoing FM, and wishing Bakoyannis well in all her future endeavors.
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